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GENE KERN

THE FAMILY ARSENAL BY PAUL THEROUX

ANNCR: THE VOICE OF AMERICA BRINGS YOU ANOTHER IN THE WEEKLY SERIES...FROM THE BOOKSHELF...IN WHICH WE REPORT ON BOOKS AMERICANS ARE READING. TODAY...THE FAMILY ARSENAL, A NOVEL BY PAUL THEROUX, PUBLISHED BY HOUGHTON MIFFLIN. HERE IS BOOK EDITOR ---------WITH GENE KERN'S REPORT.

EDITOR: THOUGH STILL ONLY IN HIS THIRTIES, PAUL THEROUX HAS ALREADY MADE HIS MARK ON THE AMERICAN LITERARY SCENE AS THE WRITER OF HIGHLY PRAISED SHORT STORIES, NOVELS, AND LAST YEAR'S NON-FICTION BEST SELLER, "THE GREAT RAILWAY BAZAAR." THAT DELIGHTFULLY ADVENTUROUS ACCOUNT OF HIS ROUNDABOUT CIRCUIT OF EUROPE AND ASIA BY TRAIN REFLECTED THE AUTHOR'S EXPERIENCE TEACHING IN UNIVERSITIES ON FOUR CONTINENTS, AS WELL AS HIS EXCEPTIONAL OBSERVATIONAL AND LITERARY TALENTS. NOW PAUL THEROUX HAS CREATED A PROVOCATIVE SUSPENSE NOVEL IN WHICH HIS PRESENT RESIDENCE, THE CITY OF LONDON, IS BOTH PROTAGONIST AND LOCAL FOR A STUDY OF TERRORIST CONSPIRACY.

THE ACTION -- AND THERE'S PLENTY OF IT -- REVOLVES AROUND VALENTINE HOOD, A DISILLUSIONED AMERICAN VIETNAM CONSULAR VETERAN, AND THREE UNLIKELY COLLEAGUES. HOOD IS SEEKING A CONNECTION WITH IRISH REPUBLICAN ARMY "PROVISIONALS" PLANNING AN "ENGLISH OFFENSIVE." MAYO, HIS CURRENT GIRL FRIEND AND LIAISON WITH THE RADICAL PROVOS, HAS STOLEN A FAMOUS OLD FLEMISH PAINTING AND BROUGHT IT TO THEIR SQUALID FLAT IN A SEEDY DISTRICT OF SOUTH LONDON. THIS

EDITOR: (CONT) IS ALSO HOME BASE FOR A SOMETIMES REPULSIVE, SOMETHING ATTRACTIVE TEEN-AGE COUPLE: MURF, THE UNDERWORLD STREET SCHOOL GRADUATE WHO MAKES BOMBS..AND HIS BEDMATE, BRODIE, WHO HAS PLANTED A BOMB THAT EXPLODED IN A RAILROAD STATION LOCKER. HIDDEN IN A TOP FLOOR ROOM ARE CRATES OF GUNS AND AMMUNITION HOOD HAS STOLEN FROM A SADISTIC ARMS DEALER HE KILLED SIMPLY BECAUSE HE WAS OFFENDED BY THE MAN'S ARROGANT AND HUMILIATING TREATMENT OF A STREET-SWEEPER AND HIS YOUNG SON. DRIVEN BY GUILT, OR PERVERSITY, OR MOTIVES EVEN LESS DISCERNIBLE, HOOD BEFRIENDS THE WIDOW OF THE ARMS DEALER AND HER DIM-WITTED CHILD, LATER ANONYMOUSLY ARRANGING FOR THEIR SUPPORT. HE ALTERNATES BETWEEN THAT PLATONIC RELATIONSHIP AND TAKING REFUGE IN THE SANCTUARY OF HIS TERRORIST COLLEAGUES. THERE, WHEN FRUSTRATION WITH THE LACK OF ACTION BECOMES INTOLERABLE, HOOD CLIMBS UPSTAIRS AND UNLOCKS THE ROOM WITH THE WEAPONS CACHE. THEN, IN THE AUTHOR'S WORDS.

VOICE: "HE SAT FOR A LONG TIME IN THE ARSENAL, SMELLING THE STEW, HEARING THE CLANK OF MAYO IN THE KITCHEN, BRODIE AND MURF BRAYING AT THE TELEVISION. IT WAS NOT DISORDER, IT WAS THE ROUTINE OF ANY NOISY FAMILY, AN ORDINARY RACKET. THIS WAS A HOME, A FAMILY ARSENAL: SAFETY WAS LIKE REMOTENESS, DISTURBANCE WAS ELSEWHERE.."

EDITOR: BUT THE MEMBERS OF THIS INCONGRUOUS QUARTET THAT ROLLS OPIUM CIGARETTES TO HEIGHTEN DREAMS OF DESTROYING THE ESTABLISHMENT SOON FIND THEMSELVES EMBROILED WITH OTHER, EVEN MORE RANDOM, REVOLUTIONARIES. ONE OF THE MOST INTRIGUING IS

EDITOR (CONT): BOWLER-HATTED RALPH GAWBER, A SEDATE, MIDDLE-AGED ACCOUNTANT WHO DAYDREAMS OF THE APOCALYPSE AS AN ESCAPE FROM THE HYPOCHONDRIA OF HIS NAGGING WIFE. OFTEN SLEEPLESS, HE PASSES THE NIGHT..

VOICE: "..WORRYING ABOUT ENGLAND AS IF SHE WERE A DEAR OLD AUNT IN FAILING HEALTH, AND NOT WHETHER OR HOW SOON THE DEATH WOULD COME, BUT HOW SHE WOULD LOOK, LAID OUT AMONG HER INDIFFERENT MOURNERS."

EDITOR: GAWBER KEEPS THE BOOKS FOR A SUCCESSFUL ACTRESS, ARABA NIGHTWING, WHO ALSO SMUGGLES ARMS FOR THE PROVOS AND TRIES TO RECRUIT BUDDING REVOLUTIONARIES WHENEVER SHE CAN FIND THEM. GAWBER ALSO SERVES THE WEALTHY UPPER-CLASS ANARCHIST, LADY ARROW, WHO BELIEVES THAT "WHAT THIS COUNTRY NEEDS IS..A GOOD SHAKING UP, ROOT AND BRANCH, THE WHOLE BUSINESS." THEROUX EXPLAINS:

VOICE: "THE PRIVILEGE OF OWNERSHIP WAS HERS, BY RIGHT, AMOUNTING ALMOST TO DUTY: SHE WAS THE COLLECTOR..SO SHE TOOK UP -- NOT CAUSES -- BUT THOSE WHO PROMOTED THEM, NOT IDEAS BUT THOSE WHO HELD THE IDEAS, NOT ACTION, BUT THOSE WHO ACTED. SHE CHOSE THE PEOPLE WITH SWIFT SKILL, LIKE FRUIT TESTED FOR RIPENESS WITH A PINCH."

EDITOR: AND SO HER LADYSHIP AMUSES HERSELF DEBAUCHING WHOMEVER SHE FANCIES, OF EITHER SEX, WHILE AFFECTING A CYNICAL PERSPECTIVE TO ENLIVEN HER DILETTANTE POLITICS. AS FOR ARABA AND HER RADICAL THEATRE GROUP, SHE SAYS:

VOICE: "THEY'RE TERRIBLY NICE PEOPLE BUT THEIR MARXISM IS SO MOTH-EATEN..THEY STINK OF SINCERITY, AND THEY WILL GO TROTTING OUT THOSE OLD IDEAS. ANY RIGHT-THINKING ANARCHIST WOULD HAVE CHUCKED THOSE PRIMITIVES YEARS AGO."

EDITOR: WITH THIS CAST, AND IN THE SETTING OF THE SLUM SECTOR OF A WORLD CAPITAL BESET WITH SERIOUS ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL PROBLEMS, THEROUX SKILLFULLY UNFOLDS HIS TAUT TALE OF INTRIGUE AND VIOLENCE. HE OFTEN BEGINS A CHAPTER WITHOUT IDENTIFYING THE CHARACTER IN FOCUS, BUT THAT INDIVIDUAL'S THINKING AND VOCALIZING RING SO TRUE THE READER IS ALMOST IMMEDIATELY AWARE OF HIS IDENTITY. THE PLOT IS CONTRIVED, BUT IT HAS A CERTAIN LOGICAL INEVITABILITY THAT MAKES THE MOST UNLIKELY COINCIDENCES ACCEPTABLE.

<u>THE FAMILY ARSENAL</u> STANDS ON ITS OWN AS AN ENGROSSING THRILLER, THOUGH IT WILL CERTAINLY NOT BE EVERYONE'S CUP OF TEA. IT IS PEOPLED WITH "LOST SOULS", FROM OUTRAGEOUSLY DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS, ENGAGED IN GENERALLY PUERILE BUT QUITE VIOLENT FORMS OF PROTEST. EACH VIEWS THE ENEMY -- THE ESTABLISHMENT -- THROUGH HIS OWN PERSONAL EYEPIECE, WITH THE DISTORTIONS INFLICTED BY HIS OR HER PARTICULAR MISSPENT YEARS. THEY HAVE NO REAL CONVICTION THAT PLAYING WITH THE TOY OF TERRORISM WILL ACCOMPLISH ANYTHING MORE THAN ADD TO THE TROUBLES OF THE POWERS-THAT-BE AND, PERHAPS INCIDENTALLY, PROVIDE A BIT OF SELF-SATISFACTION AT ENGAGING IN VIOLENT ACTIVITY WITHOUT GETTING CAUGHT. ONLY HOOD, THE BRUISED IDEALIST WHO IS

EDITOR: (CONT) CONNECTING LINK FOR THEM ALL AND WHOSE ACTIONS PROPEL THE STORY LINE, DERIVES SOME UNDERSTANDING FROM THE EXPERIENCE. AS THEROUX WRITES ABOUT HOOD:

VOICE: "HE SHUT HIS EYES AND SAW THE FUTURE...WHY ELSE WOULD ONE FIGHT? MEMORY WAS RETREAT...HE REHEARSED WHAT WAS IN STORE FOR HIM -- NOT A MATTER OF DAYS OR A MONTH, BUT YEARS AND MORE, DECADES...AND THEN HE SAW THE SAME SOLITARY MAN, SLIGHTLY HUNCHED, WHITE-HAIRED, IN FADING CLOTHES, TREADING THE DUST IN SOME TROPICAL PLACE...AN OLD MAN WHO HAD CUT HIMSELF OFF AND CHOSEN TO END HIS LIFE AMONG STRANGERS, WHO HAD RID HIMSELF OF HIS FAMILY AND LIFE AT THAT DISTANCE, HAD FALLEN SILENT AND CEASED TO ACT."

EDITOR: AFTER ONE CONSUMMATE ACT OF VIOLENCE, HOOD ANNOUNCES HE IS QUITTING. WITH MURF, AND THE WIFE AND CHILD OF THE MAN HE MURDERED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE STORY, HE LEAVES... NOT FOR GREENER PASTURES, BUT FOR THE COMFORT OF DUBIOUS COMPANIONSHIP AND OPIUM DREAMS. THE ARSENAL IS FINISHED THE FAMILY GOES ON.

ANNCR: YOU HAVE BEEN LISTENING TO A REPORT ON PAUL THEROUX'S LATEST NOVEL, <u>A FAMILY ARSENAL.</u> JOIN US AGAIN NEXT WEEK AT THIS TIME WHEN THE VOICE OF AMERICA BRINGS YOU ANOTHER REPORT ON ONE OF THE MANY BOOKS AMERICANS ARE CHOOSING <u>FROM THE BOOKSHELF</u>.

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